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SUBJECT: TURKEY GRUDGINGLY ACCEPTS PARTIAL SUSPENSION OF EU
NEGOTIATIONS

REF: ANKARA 6640

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner for reasons 1.4(b),
(d)

1.(C) Summary: In a December 19 press conference, FM Gul delivered the GOT's official response to the EU's decision to partially suspend Turkey's EU membership negotiations. Gul grudgingly accepted the decision, bemoaned the EU's "lack of vision" for failing to recognize Turkey's strategic importance, and said the suspension of eight of the remaining 34 chapters in Turkey's EU negotiations was due to an internal EU crisis. Despite these criticisms, he reiterated Turkey's determination to become a full member and said the GOT would continue its reform process, for Turkey's sake as much as to meet EU requirements. Gul's remarks reflect the ruling Justice and Development Party's (AKP) stance that the outcome was acceptable, if not what they had hoped for. The AKP played up the message that resonates most with the Turkish public -- the government held firm on Cyprus -- while avoiding a full suspension of negotiations that would prevent further progress. End summary.

2.(U) FM Gul criticized the EU's December 11 decision to suspend negotiations on eight chapters as a "lack of vision" that failed to recognize Turkey's strategic importance. He accused the EU, which he said is facing an "internal crisis," of using Turkey's failure to open its ports and airports to Greek Cypriot traffic as a pretext for the partial suspension. While Turkey "always fulfilled" its responsibilities to the EU, Gul noted, the EU failed to meet its obligation to end the economic isolation of Northern Cyprus.

3.(U) Gul nonetheless underscored Turkey's continued determination to achieve full membership, noting, "From time to time there may be ups and downs, but everyone is loyal to the main goal." Gul said the GOT would continue to implement reforms, not to make concessions to the EU, but in order to strengthen rule of law and "elevate Turks to the level of developed democracies."

4.(U) Gul praised the Finnish Presidency's efforts to advance negotiations with Turkey by resolving the Cyprus issue. He called on Germany to open negotiations on additional chapters at the outset of its EU Presidency, and to lead the EU in recognizing Turkey's contributions to resolving global problems. Gul said that Cyprus talks must proceed under a UN

framework, and that a comprehensive solution will require Greek and Turkish Cypriot participation.

5.(C) Comment: Gul's relatively controlled public remarks are consistent with prior comments by PM Erdogan and other GOT officials following the December 11 GAERC decision to suspend eight chapters (reftel). The Turks seem to have registered the advice from allies such as British PM Blair (who stopped over in Ankara on December 15) to tone down the negative rhetoric in order to calm the debate over Turkey's EU membership and allow efforts to help Turkey take hold. Though disappointed by the outcome, government officials have acknowledged that the decision allows negotiations to continue on other chapters and at the technical level, a result accomplished without the AKP having to take the politically sensitive step of compromising on the hot-button Cyprus issue. The government's measured response seems to have paid off, with the COREPER's December 20 decision to invite negotiations on the enterprise and industrial policy chapter. End comment.

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